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DEATH IN THE POETRY OF JOHN DONNE AND DYLAN THOMAS

Alice Hogan '65

It might appear at first glance that John Donne and Dylan Thomas have no more in common than stylistic complexity, but there are certain similarities in the motifs employed by each poet in his search for an adequate explanation of reality. The subject of this article is a survey of the death motif in Donne's poetry and in Thomas', in order to illustrate the disparity between the main stream of Christian tradition and one of the subjectivist approaches with which the modern mind attempts to explain the universe.

Thomas' early poetry is largely concerned with the sexual act and its consequences, because he sees a direct parallel between copulation and universal flux. All things relate in a very real sexual communion. Literally, the world is a body to Thomas. The act of love is less a matter of interpersonal communion, or even of pleasure, than a gesture of identification with the life process. In some of Thomas' later poetry, it even results in a confusion of the self with Christ.

An obviously Freudian aspect of Thomas' attitude is his "back-to-the-womb" longing for a pre-birth, pre-personality state. His purpose is to discover the meaning of death, which terrifies him, by dragging the "hidden causes" out of man's subconscious into the "clean nakedness of light." The function of poetry, then, is to probe the irrational. This seems to be the very antithesis of metaphysical intellectualism, but a short analysis of one of Thomas' more successful poems easily demonstrates the conscious use of reason to order the poet's investigation of the subconscious. In "If I were tickled by the rub of love," the poet is concerned with the moment when mutability seems so terrify-

ing that even sex (with all its ramifications) loses its attraction. The real "rub" is the existence of death in all things. Thomas says:

*The world is half the devil's and
my own,
Daft with the drug that's smoking in
a girl
And curling round the bud that forks
her eye.
And old man's shank one-marrowed with
my bone,
And all the herrings smelling in the sea,
I sit and watch the worm beneath my nail
Wearing the quick away.
And that's the rub, the only rub the
tickles.
The knobby ape that swings along
his sex
From damp love-darkness and the
nurse's twist
Can never raise the midnight of a chuckle...*

Thomas' early, morbid obsession with death manifests itself in the "worm beneath my nail." What he is saying is that even when hypnotized by sex ("the drug that's smoking in a girl"), he feels the impotence of old age threatening his youthful body from within. He sits alive and watches the worm gnawing at his flesh. He looks at the sea and smells the dead fish. All his senses are more aware of impending death than of present life. The last stanza focuses upon the crux of the argument:

*And what's the rub? Death's feather on
the nerve?*

*Your mouth, my love, the thistle in
the kiss?
My Jack of Christ born thorny on
the tree?
The words of death are drier than
his stiff,
My wordy wounds are printed with
your hair.
I would be tickled by the rub that is:
Man be my metaphor.*

The real rub is not physical fear, nor even the "thistle" of death implicit in the lover's touch. To my understanding, the element of death in the sex act is here subordinate to Thomas' own identification, as poet, with the process of sexual-cosmic flux. He sees himself as a Hopkins-like "everyman" Christ (My Jack of Christ," "My wordy wounds"), issuing directly from the life force to the tree of crucifixion. His suffering results from his superior consciousness, the poetic curse which forces him to conceptualize the true nature of the life-death process. If "Jack of Christ" is an Ancient Mariner, he is also an adolescent tormented by sexual problems. There is, then, a cyclic movement from the inadequacy of the sex act to the birth of the poet (who is also a god, because a creator) to his realization of "the rub that is" through poetry and sexual torment. The possible resolution is magnificently ambiguous: "Man be my metaphor." According to William York Tindall, this means either man is a microcosm or little world, or the poet desires to discard his simian sexuality (the "knobbly ape") and act like a human being. My own reading involves the cyclic process. If all human behavior is darkened by this shadow of death, which is irreparably an element of sex, then man is his own symbol of death, his own *momento mori*. As often as he sees or engenders human life, the poet heralds human death. In other words, both of Tindall's interpretations are correct. Man is, literally, microcosmic; simultaneously, Thomas reaffirms the worth of humanity by asserting that the creative artist, at least, can sufficiently detach himself to comprehend the whole cycle.

The cyclic movement, carefully patterned in contrasts, parallels, and a refrain reminiscent of Hamlet's, proves the presence of intellectual ordering. But the poem also illustrates the point

that Thomas' central concern is an appeal to the irrational element in man. This is where he seeks the meaning of death, for, in a Freudian and pantheistic universe, man returns to the flux at death and, if there is any meaning to the process at all, it must be hidden in that element of man which is closest to the sexual-mystical unknown. This is the subconscious.

Donne's approach is, obviously, far different. He consciously cultivates order, seeking to define the emotional experience by an intellectual parallel. The whole is oriented toward one organic effect, which he himself likens to the "beating out of a piece of gold."

Donne and Thomas are similar in that each is engaged in a lonely struggle for security in an insecure age. Donne sought to order his life by reviving the rationalism of his scholastic heritage within a religious *and* empirical framework. Thomas lapsed into intellectual fads and sought his answers somewhere beyond the traditional uses of the mind. The difference lies largely in the fact that, in the seventeenth century, one could still find a living power in tradition, while Thomas' generation wanted to discard an apparently sterile past in favor of a Freudian future.

Donne's love poetry may be used to illustrate Thomas' radical attitude. For one thing, love and the universe are analogical in Donne's imagery, not literally one. Moreover, Donne loves an individual, not a depersonalized force. "The Extasie" insists on a Platonic, spiritual union before the physical consummation can have any real meaning. The whole man is involved in the emotion of love, but reason leads. The cyclic process here involves a progression from physical communion to the mixing of souls and, only then, a complimentary marriage of bodies: "Love's mysteries in souls do grow,/ But yet the body is his book." Love, for Donne, is both physical and transcendent, and the process is understood by the reason, by an intellectual dialectic. Thomas would deny both the spiritual level of reality and the need to place the issue in severely rational terms.

Both poets do believe in the organic unity of life. Speaking of the inseparable oneness of body and soul, Donne says: "We are the intelligences, they the spheres." But Thomas' unity is pantheistic, while Donne's clearly involves the direction of a supreme Creator. For Thomas, man and the universe are literally one; Donne

analogizes the human and the natural and places God over both.

Donne's attitude toward death is more traditional, too. On one level, he considers death subservient to love. Thus, in "The Dissolution," the mistress' death is enough to initiate the destruction of the lover. Death is as much a slave to their desire to be united as it will be to "Fate, Chance, Kings, and desperate men" in "Death be not proud." For Thomas, dissolution is implicit in the act of generation. The presence of an unbreakable personal bond, the traditional power of human emotions, has nothing to do with it. Donne's lovers are the courtly conquerors of death. Thomas, in characteristically modern fashion, places the whole process beyond human will and dignity.

The similarity between Thomas' "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" and Donne's "Death be not proud" would appear to be too obvious to mention, yet the two poets differ in their defiance. They are unlike in their understanding of the nature of the thing they defy. Death cannot conquer in Thomas' poem because man, although he loses his individual identity, continues to exist by returning to the flux: "Dead men naked they shall be one/ With the man in the wind and the west moon." The basic sexual dynamism encompasses all personality: "Though lovers be lost love shall not." Simultaneously, however, death gives individual human life its grandeur ("They shall have stars at elbow and foot"), its heroism ("Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break"), and its essential indestructibility ("Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;/ Break in the sun till the sun breaks down"). This last phrase asserts that man will outlive physical nature, because he is in union with flux itself, a more basic manifestation of reality than the material universe. This pagan interpretation of immortality relies upon our emotional response to the more orthodox connotations of Resurrection. It echoes St. Paul's "Death, where is thy sting?" by side-stepping the issue. Thomas could not explain why "Split all ends up they shall not crack." He depends upon the hypnotic effect of his own rhetoric and our preconceived responsiveness. He does not trust in faith, which will "snap in two," or in reason. His intuitive approach is powerful in appeal because it offers salvation to the passive. Pantheistic indestructi-

bility is immortality without responsibility.

According to Stuart Holroyd, Thomas' God is a pre-moral deity demanding only a complete absorption in the life of the senses. Other gods are transcendent as well as immanent, but Thomas' is wholly immanent, discovered in the sexual organs or buried in the unconscious.

Donne, on the other hand, is much closer to the spirit of *I Corinthians* 15. In St. Paul's theology, death is basically impotent, because it derives its power from without, from man's sin. Its defeat is also external in origin, based on the merits of Christ's Resurrection. Death is contingent to the will, then, because man can choose the salvation which renders its "sting" powerless. Donne adheres to this line of reasoning. Death is fundamentally harmless on a physical level because it effects the "soul's delivery." It is a "slave" to "Fate, Chance" and the wills of "desperate men." Man is capable of approximating its effects with "charms." Essentially, man is victorious over death because "One short sleep past, we wake eternally,/ And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die." Although this sonnet is more assertive than many of Donne's other poems, it appeals basically to the mind. It is Christian doctrine, not merely a cunning utilization of tradition to serve unique and wholly personal ends. Simultaneously, Donne's poem incorporates more of human experience within its traditional concept of death as a sleep from which we rise glorified. This greater universality makes the metaphysical sonnet more effective.

In Donne's era man learned that, as he taught himself to master the world, he lost more and more his old social, intellectual, and spiritual security. God seemed farther away; more energy was required to approach Him. But the struggle still had meaning. Reconciliation was still possible. By the twentieth century, however, human egoism had evicted God from His universe. In search of a substitute, man elevated the only mystery remaining: his own unconscious, irrational self. Death is the climax of life. As Donne sought its significance in tradition, the repository of meaning in an objective world, Thomas tried to explain the ultimate mystery in terms of a subjective cosmology. He seems to have been considerably less successful.

Cambric Tea

I take my cream with tea . . .
and when I am older than
gingham smocks
and proper play,
certain
that my daisy crowns
are straight,
I'll royal.

I'll be enough.
(Thank-you.)

Lorraine Di Pietro, '65

Allegro Vivace

Out into a day
with an emerald in her smile,
I will follow you —
my vibrant poplar.

In a field of noonshine
pebbled with lost daisies,
I will touch your shadow —
oh my singing pine.

At the right hand of duskhawk
with a bright sword in its throat,
We will shatter loud clouds —
my white-blown wave.

Along the alleyways of night
by the moon's bland face,
We will sound together —
oh my single bell.

Ann Dailey, '67

THE FEASTERS

Barbara Keegan, '65

From the edge of the park, Adam took in the *Feasters* huddled in a circle. Each guy had one hand stuck in a pocket; the other was busy with a cigarette. The bright leather of their black jackets reflected the burning tips. They reminded Adam of the kitchen light shining on the black coal stove in his kitchen, and his mother shouting in a dog-pitched voice, "Now where are you going tonight? You're never home anymore. When do you study for school? You'll never get anyplace you know, without working. You can't get a good job without graduating. And yesterday you were so sick. You should be in bed early tonight."

Adam had yelled back as he slipped out the door, "Yah, Ma, I know. I did my homework in study periods in school. My grades are O.K. and I feel fine. I'll be back soon."

He had known he hadn't anything to worry about. His Ma hollered a lot because she was tired of working in Coldstone's all day, but she always let him go and that too was because she was tired. Still, she ought to know a guy of seventeen had his own business. In the importance of the night, little things he always accepted as natural bothered him and seemed to make him small and unimportant.

This was a big time for him. To belong to the *Feasters* gave a guy prestige in school and girls respected you. He had just one more test to go through before he was a member, before he could warm himself in the circle. He had already jumped from McGraw's grocery roof



to Henry's pharmacy where last year Marty Stein fell and broke his back. He still wore a brace on it.

He had passed the second test with no trouble and stolen the hub caps from Captain Hayes' family car and drained the gas from Corpelio's limosine. Everyone knew he was tied up in the rackets. Adam had stolen eight shirts from Corbett's store and painted stinking words all over the statue of General Freedman in the middle of the park. The alderman thought it beautified the district, but one block of green doesn't do much for a city of rust and soot.

All of these tests hadn't been much trouble, but Adam was bugged about tonight. This was the big test, the last test. It was supposed to be held the night before except Adam hadn't shown. He had been sick with a fever and his Ma called Doc Stobeski who made him stay in bed. She had hovered over him, so he couldn't have slipped out. He hadn't even felt much like sneaking out even if it meant his last chance with the *Feasters*. Once he had tried to raise himself to his feet, but reeled like he had been on a runaway trolley. Doc had said it had been just the grippie and the next day he'd be all right. A short twenty four hours before Adam had felt that the *Feasters* would just have to wait, but now that the time had come for the final test he wished it was all over, over before Turkey had hated him. He knew that it didn't take much for the *Feasters* to think you chicken and they bore down hard on chickens like bargain day shoppers or hounds to the kill.

He had just escaped this on the way to school. The day had been hell. Turkey Traluski, a little runt with eyes that pierced the dark like street lamps at midnight and whose flesh was soft and smooth like a wet cut beef in Angelo's market had crowded him hard. He'd been waiting around the corner from Adam's apartment and said through chalk white teeth, "Well, you lily-livered scum, where were you?"

Adam had started and Turkey shuffled from a doorway. "I was sick," he had tried an evenness that hadn't been there.

"Yah, with girly fear,"

"Don't worry," Adam had reddened, "I'll be there tonight."

"Who says there is gonna be a tonight for

you, fella. You just don't stand up the *Feasters* with no kind of message."

"What'd you expect me to do, send my mother or maybe the Doc? Do you want to have the cops down on you for real?" He had started for school and Turkey stalked silently behind him. Adam had wished he had been up where he could see him, but he couldn't have shown the twitch of his head to turn over his shoulder or he'd really have been finished. He'd heard more footsteps behind him. *Feasters* had fallen in one at a time from each passing doorway.

He had to be careful with this one. He'd always known that the *Feasters* weren't easy to tangle with. Once you started with them there was no turning back. Adam remembered Larry Platznik, who had started the tests, but backed down and he also had remembered the beating his sister had taken. Still, even though they'd always given it rough to outsiders they had done anything for a fella *Feaster*, alibis, money, everything. You couldn't be a *Feaster* unless you were the biggest man around.

When Adam had first started testing for the *Feasters* they'd been like little gods against the stinking rotten world of canned food and housing projects. They had taken no lip from anybody; to be a *Feaster* made you something. It had been worth the risks to be big in the district. It had seemed that nobody ever crossed you. Even the teachers at Central had always watched out when a *Feaster* was in the class. It could make you or break you and Adam had to force himself to play it cool or he'd have been broken for good.

He'd waited until he was near the intersection before turning around. Nothing could happen with cars passing by. When he had spun to face them he'd been surprised to see only four waiting *Feasters*. From the sound of their footsteps he'd thought they would be out in full force.

"Well chicken," Turkey had said, protected by the rest of the *Feasters*, "Why isn't your Ma walking you to school?"

"Because I can walk myself."

"That's right, chicken, your Ma's a hash slinger, but she keeps good care of you at night, doesn't she? Tucks you in real good. Makes sure the door's locked, doesn't she?" Turkey had tilted his head like over a baby and with

his fleshy hands fixed imaginary blankets. The others had laughed. Hawker had shown his gape tooth from his big mouth and Bear Banzatini smiled in knowing appreciation. He was Turkey's man. Bear had the biggest red hands and the widest shoulders at Central. The Mouse had twittered from underneath his concealing hand. For a twitterer, Adam had thought, he sure could throw a knife. He had passed all his tests with no problem. Only Turkey, with his thin goatee and balding head hadn't passed the tests. He hadn't needed to; he had thought them up. The *Feasters* had been his idea and for a Jew he had run it like Hitler.

Adam had known the *Feasters* thought a shut mouth belonged to a chicken so he spat and said, "The only way you can tell if I'm yellow is to give me the test tonight. If I don't show, you got me. If I do you'll find out."

Turkey had smiled his marshmallow white teeth and seethed, "Look, chicken, I don't like postponements. I say you're yellow right here." His hand had reached for the pocket where he always carried a switchblade and sometimes the gun he had rebuilt from parts in the dump.

The morning sun had lit bright patches of snow, but the whizzing cars splashed it to dirty slush and blasted cold onto Adam's neck. Turkey had always been a smart guy. Adam had known he would be too bright to start anything on the street where traffic would be all over. Usually he'd have been too smart to try something like this too, but he had to make Turkey back down or the *Feasters* would brand him a coward and interfere with his girls, his actions, his every breath. He'd have to depend on Turkey's brains. All this had been recognized in the whispered, "Prove it."

Turkey's red nose had sniffed high in the air and Adam thought he'd played it wrong; that maybe he'd been too boiling to care. Turkey had looked around him as the cars streaked by, and he'd seen Copper Cooney on the next corner. He'd opened his starch white teeth and said with a heavy grin,

"I'm not gonna crucify you in public. I'm gonna let the test nail you tonight. I'm gonna think up a real good one." Turkey had been superior and scorned him through his lips and the toss of his thin oily hair, but he had backed down.

Adam had laughed, mustering up his own

superiority and cooed, "Be careful you don't bang your thumb with the hammer instead of hitting the nails in my coffin."

The Mouse had squeaked in appreciation, but in one look from Turkey he swallowed it. Adam had wished he could walk away from them in triumph and leave them in the cold, but they'd all be going to Central and if he had left them they'd think he had bluffed them. The silence in which they had marched to the school hung with tension and with the hate of unspoken defeat.

Tonight the circle looked closed against him. He felt like a bowling pin waiting for the ball to knock him off. He could feel the anger Turkey had worked up in the group. They would let him go through with the test. Turkey wouldn't back down again, but the terror that would be in the test shivered in him and his ignorance of it pumped his heart.

"Well," said Turkey, "sit down, chicken, and listen. If you want to be a *Feaster* you have to fill certain conditions. You've passed all the others, but that ain't nothing to the final test. At ten tonight Mouse is gonna phone the cop joint and report a robber prowling at 317 S St. That's that big apartment building. He's gonna holler real loud for the fuzz and when they come you're gonna be ready with all these bundles. You have to wait until they open the cruiser door before you start running. They won't miss seeing you and no matter what they do, you have to keep on going. If you get away you're a *Feaster*. Meet us back here at eleven and have all the packages. They're very valuable to me so if you lose one it's no go."

Adam wanted to ask about the chance of his being shot in the back; of his being the first dead *Feaster*. The circle leered at him with Turkey's hate. They were ready to pounce on him as a coward so he didn't dare. He wondered how the *Feasters* who were now lined up against him would open their arms and ranks to him at eleven. He wondered quickly if they'd have to, but forced that out of his mind. He pushed the glory of the *Feasters* forward in his thoughts. He said over and over again to himself that he was almost a *Feaster*. It didn't really matter how they forgot their hate and accepted him just so long as they did. When everything was at his fingertips, he couldn't let it crumble. It was too late to turn

back anyhow. When you got this far in the *Feasters* you got out only if they beat you out as yellow with scars that lasted for life. But he couldn't think of this either. He had to think that he was still choosing the *Feasters*; that the world wasn't closing in. Still the weight of compulsion pained his stomach. He knew he was toying with his life; that there was no telling what an excited cop would do. Adam remembered hearing that Iggy Kazenski's brother was shot down in the street because some cop thought he was a gangster.

It was an all or nothing game, but backwards was nothing and at least in the test there was the chance for everything. He tightened his stomach to force its pain still and said, "Let's go. I want to look the place over." He marched at the head of the *Feasters* like a prisoner to be hanged, while his captors carried the precious packages of his trial.

317 S St. loomed over Adam's head. It was fourteen stories tall and the windows were lit up like a Christmas tree. The eye of the moon spotted the *Feasters* and their silent shadows weaved quickly along the ground.

Adam said, "Well, the cop'll have no problem seeing me here."

"What's a matter, nervous?" Turkey poked. "Nope, just sizing up the situation. This escape will be perfect, but not because of luck. It'll be brains," Adam said it aloud and then to himself, over and over. "This escape will be perfect. This escape will be perfect." Maybe if he said it enough it would be true.

"Come over here and wait." Turkey motioned toward a narrow unlit alley that was burrowed from the first floor in the middle of the apartment building. The *Feasters* left Adam to wait at the beginning of the alley and dumping packages on him, they went to the rear of it and watched. Adam was almost knocked over by the dumped bundles. They were wrap-

ped rocks; six boulders that even now ached his arms.

Sirens sped from G St. The shadows of the alley were comforting and the sinking in Adam's knees wanted to push him back into the darkness. But the *Feasters* were back there, watching, waiting for a false move, so he couldn't turn back. He would have run back to the slums, to the dirt and poverty if he could have, but it was too late.

Sirens screeched their mourning into the night. Adam cast a look over his right shoulder. Turkey was there with his plaster-white smile, daring him to run into the alley, to come near the bulge in his pocket that he wrapped his hand around. Turkey would never let him chicken out. Backwards or forwards it was suddenly the same. But how would Turkey feel when Adam passed the test? He'd have to accept him then, but Adam wasn't sure Turkey would ever forget the way he pulled him up short in the street.

The police car stopped. Adam had to run. He wanted to run, to put space between him and the test and Turkey and the cops. The cruiser door opened and he saw a blue serge leg spring from the car as he ran. The wind speared his face, he dropped the packages to swing his arms. He wished he could fly in the air, but the cold leadened his feet and anchored them to the ground.

"Stop, stop, or I'll shoot," blew into his brain. Adam had just a little farther to run 'till he could veer down a side street and into the backyards of houses. The cop had to fire a warning shot first and the time it would take for this would save him. Suddenly, a knifing speed cut Adam's life. Reeling with the wide eyes of death he saw the cops running forward and the chalk-dust smile of Turkey as he slid into the alley, his hand moving back into his pocket.

A Name

A name like common blood from a scratch
A name too simple to be remembered
A name said thoughtlessly like a glass of pure water
A name ready made to give to unknowns

A name like the heart that beats the hour that sounds
The memory of time that a bounding bullet rippled
A name that causes no stir
A name like the wristband the soldiers wear

A name one could read of on the wind from the signs
On the civil documents the tombstones
A name engraved on street stalls
Whose Christian name bleeds
Like the murdered feet of a child in wooden shoes

For he was a child like all of us
all those other yesterdays
Who watched his executioners in awe at dawn
And the women too stammered this name
Not knowing it would be a hero's

This common name like an untilled field
Is today blessed among those of our town
On the sidewalk they placed flowers beneath the placards
And ladies in black come to kneel and pray
A beautiful name without color as they make them in France
To pass through the crowd and die without weariness
A name silent as indifference
A name like the fires of a village in the night

(Translated by Catherine Griffin '65 from the French, "X . . . Francais" by Louis Aragon, and printed here by permission of Mr. Aragon.)



There are those

*who live in a twilight world,
that is to say,
not beyond this world,
but living only half this life.*

Crisis on a Saturday Morning

Catherine Griffin '65

Setting: *a basement shoe store. A staircase leads to a ramp across the upper portion of the stage. On the ramp a Public Address speaker is prominently placed. On back wall, racks of shoe boxes and more of them all over the floor. In the middle of the stage are four chairs with the usual plastic upholstery. There is a space through the middle of the chairs. A counter with cash register. The shoe clerk is seated in shadow at the up-stage left. A spot focuses on a man seated in the right end chair. His legs are crossed. He wears a blue suitcoat, brown trousers, and a green polka dot tie. (The lapels of the suit are too wide a la 1930, also the tie.)*

Philosopher: There are those
 who live in a twilight world,
 that is to say,
 not beyond this world,
 but living only half this life.
 They live in darkened rooms
 and they stumble
 among the furnishings
 of their own lives
 as unfamiliar objects
 to be feared.
 They ignore the naked bulb
 that hangs suspended always
 from the ceiling.
 They are afraid of the light.
 They concern themselves
 with putting out
 a smokescreen
 within which
 their lives go on.
 The making of this fog
 becomes the pivotal point
 of their lives.
 Their engrossment in it
 substitutes for life itself.
 This becomes so much a part of them
 that they do not even know

how their state
has come about
or even that—
such a state exists in them.
Their hearts are given over
to hiding their secret
from themselves.
They cannot bear
to doubt
the value of their lives
and any lifting in the fog
becomes a crisis.

He gets up and climbs the stairs purposefully. The clerk arises and comes forward, duster in hand, he is a young man of about twenty-eighth. He is wearing a dark blue suit and a yellow badge with the number seventy on it in big black letters. He dusts the chairs, lower rail of a staircase, edges of shoeboxes.

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, Clerk Number Seventy, please finish dusting and begin stocking latest merchandise.

As if animated, the clerk gives a final swisp to the chairs, places the duster in a lower rack of the counter and begins to sort out the shoe boxes. Three at a time, he picks them up, checks the ends, and repeats their contents, e.g. "Six and a half brown pumps," He puts away a dozen boxes like this. A woman, rather non-descript, appears at the top of the stairs. She is wearing a green and brown housedress and a white coatsweater. A little boy with her is wearing blue jeans and a faded red jacket and cap. He jumps down the stairs two at a time making "zoom, zoom" noises as he swishes his pin wheel. The clerk straightens, stands stiff for a moment.

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, Clerk Number Seventy, please wait on customers.

Clerk: Good Morning, may I help you, Madam?

Woman: Yes, I want a pair of black shoes for him, size 9.

Clerk: Of course, will you take a seat. I'll be right back.

The woman and boy sit, the boy half stands up in the chair, one leg swung along the back. He swooshes his pin wheel. He notices the P.A. box. The clerk turns around with three boxes of shoes. The boy asks:

Little Boy: Hey Mister, what's that box?

Clerk (surprised): Don't you know?

Little Boy: Uh, uh, what's it for? Is it for a special kind of shoe? It looks like the box we have in school that the principal talks through.

Woman (annoyed): Tommy, sit down and don't ask so many questions.

Little Boy (plumping down): O.K.

They try on a pair of shoes.

Woman (pinching toes of shoes): How do they feel, Tommy? Are they too tight? Walk a little more. Maybe we should get them a size too big so you can grow into them. (to clerk:) He's growing so fast!

Little Boy: They're O.K. Mama, why can't I get sneakers? All the other kids have them. Johnny Brown wears them and Dickle and Bucky . . .

Woman: You know very well why. Are you sure they're not too tight?

Little Boy: I said they're O.K.!

Woman (*to clerk*): I think we'll take these. You're sure they'll last a while? How much will that be?

Clerk (*starting to put shoes in a bag*): That'll be \$3.98, Ma'am. These are on sale this week, and a very good buy.

Little boy (*running over*): Can I have the box, Mister? I need it for my rock collection. (*Clerk smiles*) I've got lots of rocks. I found a real piece of mica the other day. Have you ever seen a real piece of mica?

Clerk: No, I don't think I have. What is it?

Little Boy (*excited*): Well, it's all nice and shiny and flaky in parts too. It's kind of goldish. Hardly any of the guys have it.

Clerk: That sounds very nice.

Little Boy: Say, I only have one piece of mica. But I have a double of rose quartz. Here you want it? See, it's pretty.

Clerk: Yes. It is very pretty. I'll put it right here on top of the cash register where everyone can see it. I'll be sure to tell them what it is and who gave it to me. (*He finishes putting the box in a bag, rings up the price, and hands bag to the woman*)

Little Boy: We're going to the circus now, but tomorrow I'll go find you a piece of mica. O.K.? And I'll come back and tell you about the clowns and the lions and the acrobats. O.K.? I like the clowns best, don't you? (*imitates clown*) "Ho, ho, ho, hello children. I'm Booby the clown. And what's this in my collar?" (*pulls out from behind his neck an imaginary bouquet of flowers*) Flowers! Now how did they get there? (*scratches head*) I guess I didn't wash my neck! (*They both laugh although the clerk is not sure why*)

Woman: Tommy, come along. Leave the man to his work. We don't want to be late. Tie that shoe lace better and zip up your jacket.

Clerk: (*puzzled*): Circus?? Yes, that'll be fine. You come back and tell me about it.

Little Boy (*sing-song*): We're going to the circus, the circus, we're going to the circus. Bye, mister!

(*The clerk fingers the quartz, holds it up to the electric light. Then he replaces it and stiffens.*)

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, please finish stock immediately.

(*Again induced to action, he kneels and starts to pick up some boxes, then turns and goes back to hold up the quartz again.*)

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, please finish stock immediately.

Clerk (*resuming work*): Size twelve, men's loafers, brown.

Again this goes on awhile. A young woman appears. She wears a white linen-like dress and seems radiantly happy. She carries a pink bag and wears pink shoes and gloves. She rhapsodies down the stairs.

Lady in White (*joyously*): Good morning!

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, please wait on customer.

Clerk (*unstiffening*): May I be of service to you, Miss?

Lady in White (*sitting*): You certainly may! I want a pair of white wedding shoes, size seven, with a two inch heel.

Clerk: Do you wish them with a pattern or plain? We have quite a variety of styles.

Lady in White: Oh, I want to see them all please!

Clerk (*bowing slightly*): Of course.

(He goes to back stage wall to get shoes. She radiates and sings in shreds.)

Clerk: I think you'll find something you like among these. They're our very best.

(He opens box and starts to put a shoe on her)

Lady in White *(astonished)*: But these are black!

Clerk: Oh no, that's impossible—I'm sure . . . But I . . . I'm quite certain I . . .

Lady in White: Oh please, it's all right. If you'll just get the right . . .

Clerk: *(to himself)*: I've never done anything like this before. How did it happen? What's happening to me?

Lady in White *(standing up)*: Are you all right?

She puts out her hand to touch his forearm. He draws back, holding the arm she has just touched. He stands a moment looking at her in awe.

Lady in White: Is there anything I can do? You really don't have to be so upset.

Anyone can make a mistake. We all make them once in a while. I forgot to put paper in my typewriter this morning. It happens all the time to everyone.

Clerk *(beginning to recover)*: A mistake? . . . Yes, I'll get your shoes for you, Miss.

(He moves slowly, gets shoes, returns)

Clerk: I can't understand this. It never happened before. I'm sorry. Really sorry.

Lady in White: "It's nothing to take so seriously.

(They try on the shoes)

Lady in White: Oh, I like those! Let me try them! *(switches shoes)* Oh these are what I want! *(She sits admiring them)*

Clerk *(ill-at-ease, hesitatingly)*: Miss, may I ask you something?

Lady in White *(sympathetically)*: Yes, I suppose so. Go ahead.

Clerk *(hesitating again)*: What is a "circus"?

Lady in White *(surprised)*: Oh . . . you must be new in this country, but you speak excellent English. Don't they have circuses where you come from? But how would you know if you don't know what a circus is. Let me see now, how can I explain a circus to you. Well, it's a whole lot of entertainment, all at once. There are animal acts: lion tamers and trained seals and bears and horses that dance. And there are daredevil acts like diving into a fiery hoop or walking a thin wire way above everyone's head. You'd really have to go to one to appreciate it. Have I made it any clearer?

Clerk *(confused)*: What's a lion and a bear?

Lady in White: A lion is a large wild cat from Africa, very ferocious with a huge mane and huge teeth . . . a bear *(holding up shoe)* . . . Ah dear, next you'll be asking me what is a wedding! Gracious, I'm sorry, but I don't have time to define everything for you. Don't you have a dictionary?

Clerk *(brightening)*: Oh yes, of course!

(He runs over to the counter, returns with a little pamphlet-like book)

Lady in White: This is only about shoes!

Clerk: Oh no, it tells about chairs, and boxes and cash registers and, and . . .

Lady in White *(rummaging in her purse)*: Wait a minute. I think I have a pocket dictionary. Here it is! I don't know why I carry it. I never use it. Now you can look up whatever you like.

(She sets the dictionary on the chair and they finish transacting their business at cash register.)

Clerk: \$8.98. Thank you! Would you like anything else?

Lady in White: No thank you. I hope you find what you're looking for in that dictionary. It's kind of hard at first. Bye.

(Lady in White looks over her shoulder sympathetically as she exits—then regains her joyous mood. Clerk goes over to the chairs, picks up the dictionary and sits down.)

ence by acting upon; to induce. 12. To practice trickery upon (one) for one's own ends; as, he *worked* the management for a ticket. 13. To excite; provoke; — often with *up*; as, to *work* oneself into a rage. 14. To cause to ferment, as liquor.

work one's passage. To pay for a passage by doing work on board or about the conveyance. — **work out.** a To effect by labor and exertion. b To solve, as a problem; also, to develop or arrange; as, to *work out* a plan. c To exhaust, as a mine, by working. d To make its way out; as, a nail that *works out* from the sole of my shoe. e To make payment of in labor rather than in money; as, to *work out* one's expenses. f To show itself out, as shown to be a cabaret, effervescent, etc., a show that will not *work out*.

work'a-ble (*würk'ə-bəl'*), *adj.* Capable of being worked. — **work'a-bil'i-ty** (*-bil'i-tē*), **work'a-ble-ness** *n.*

work'a-day (*-dā'*) *n.* a certain day, or days, of working; hence, sometimes, profane; ordinary.

work'bag (*würk'bäg'*), *n.* A bag for holding implements or materials for work, esp., a reticule for needlework.

work'bench (*-bēnch'*), *n.* a bench on which work is performed; as by mechanics, carpenters, etc.

work'day (*-dā'*), *n.* 1. A day on which work is performed, as distinguished from Sunday, festivals, etc.; a working day. 2. the period of time in the day during which work is performed. — *Workday*, *n.*

worked (*würkt*), *adj.* That has been subjected to some process of treatment, manufacture, or the like.

Syn. Worked, wrought. Both as past and participle, *worked* implies preparation or (esp.) operation by labor; *wrought* suggests the molding or fashioning of something, esp. from the rough.

work'er (*würk'ər*), *n.* 1. One who or that which works; laborer; toiler. 2. Any citizen of Soviet Russia, other than a soldier or sailor, who works either with hand or brain for his living; — used in contrast to *capitalist* or *bourgeois*. 3. Zool. One of the neuter, or sterile, individuals of the social ants, bees, and termites. The workers are generally (except in termites) females having the sexual organs imperfectly developed.

work'folk (*würk'föök'*), **work'folks** (*-föök's*), *n.* pl. Workpeople.

work'house (*-hous'*), *n.* 1. *Obs.* A workshop. 2. In England, a poorhouse. 3. U.S. A house of correction in which petty offenders, as drunkards or vagrants, are confined and put at work.

work'ing (*würk'īng*), *adj.* 1. Doing work; engaged in labor; as, a *working* woman. 2. Of, relating to, occupied by, or taken up with, work; as, *working* hours. 3. Adequate to permit work to be done or to accomplish necessary results; as, they had a *working* majority in the legislature. 4. Twitching spasmodically, as if moved by great feeling; — said esp. of the face or the muscles of the face. — said of liquor, cider, vinegar, etc. 5. Used to facilitate other or further work; as, a *working* hypothesis. — *n.* 1. *Now Rare.* the making of something by labor; skill, or manner of making something. 2. The process of solving, as of a mathematical problem; calculation. 3. The act of solving, as of a mathematical problem; calculation. 4. The act of solving, as of a mathematical problem; calculation. 5. The act of solving, as of a mathematical problem; calculation. 6. Progress gradually made by or as if by effort; as, his *working* against the current. 7. Any excavation made by hand, tunneling, etc.; — chiefly in pl. Fermentation.

WORKING ASSET. Accounting. Intangible assets of permanent character; — a term

of account. — *Working capital.* Excess of quick assets over liabilities. 2. Finance. The portion of the business which is not invested in plant, etc., and contains liquid.

work-day. a A workday. b The number of hours, determined by law or custom, during which a workman, hired at a fixed price per day, must work to be entitled to a day.

work-day, *adj.* Pert. to, or characteristic of, workdays; workaday; hence, plodding.

drawing. Arch. & Mech. A drawing made to be followed by the workmen.

man' (*würk'īng-män'*), *n.* A laboring man.

papers. Official documents, such as an age certifying the employment of a minor.

substance. Mech. The substance, usually a *working fluid*, under pressure, that actuates the parts, etc., in an engine or the like.

workless (*würk'lēs*; -*lis*), *adj.* Without work; unemployed.

workman (*würk'män*), *n.* A man employed for wages ten, a skilled artificer or laborer.

workman, laborer, artisan, mechanic, craftsman. Work-

general term; it often applies to one who does relatively

a laborer's work demands strength or exertion rather

than skill; a craftsman is esp. one employed in an industrial or mechanic

process; the term is now commonly restricted to a workman

employed in a factory, or using machinery; a craftsman is

work'man-like (*würk'män-līk*), *adj.* Befitting a workman; craftsmanship; also, the quality imparted to work by the process of making. 2. That which is effected, done, or produced; work.

work of art. A production of art; specif., a production in one of the fine arts, esp. in painting or sculpture.

work-out (*würk'out'*), *n.* *Slang.* A test or trial to determine ability or capacity for some special position, work, competition, race, etc.

work'peo'ple (*-peō'plē*), *pl.* People who work, esp. at manual labor; aborigines.

work (*würk*), *n.* pl. of works. See WORK, 5, 6, & 11.

works council. A body or committee formed by an employer among workers within his organization for the discussion of problems of industrial relations.

workshop (*würkshōp'*), *n.* A shop where any manufacture or handicraft is carried on.

work'table (*würk'tāblē*), *n.* A table for holding working materials, esp. in a small shop.

workwoman (*würk'wōm'än*), *n.* A woman who works.

world (*würld*), *n.* [AS. *weoruld*, *worold*.] 1. The earth and the heavens; the universe. 2. The earth and its inhabitants, with their affairs and interests; hence, humanity; mankind; also, people in general; the public; as, all the world loves a lover. 3. A sphere or scene of life and action; as, the present world. 4. Individual experience of, or concern with, life on earth; course of life; career; as, to fail, and begin the world anew. 5. The customs, practices, and interests of men as social beings; — usually with *the*; as, to withdraw from the world. 6. The section of mankind engrossed in the concerns of this present life.

7. Concerns of this life as distinguished from those of the life to come; hence, secular affairs or interests. 8. As an emblem of immensity, a great multitude or quantity. 9. A division, or section, of the earth, its concerns, inhabitants etc., regarded as a separate, independent unit; as, the Old World; the medieval world. 10. One of the three grand divisions or primary groups of natural objects; a kingdom, as, the animal, mineral, or vegetable world. 11. A class of persons regarded as a body and distinguished by some characteristic; as, the heathen world; the musical world; hence, the peculiar interests of such a body or the realm of such interests; as, the world of art and letters. 12. A whole likened to the world, as by reason of completeness, variety, complexity, or the like; a domain. 13. A planet or heavenly body, esp. when regarded as inhabited and as the scene of interests analogous to human interest.

— *Syn.* See EARTH.

world'ling (*würld'ling*), *n.* [world + 1st -ling.] A son engrossed in the concerns of this present world.

world'y (-*ly*), *adj.*; **WORLD'LI-ER** (-*lēr*); **WORLD'LI-EST** (-*lēst*).

1. Of or belonging to this world or existence in this world; earthly or spiritual. 2. Specif., of or relating to the concerns of this life as distinguished from those of the life to come; secular; as, *worldly* pleasures. 3. Wise ways of the present world; sophisticated. — *Syn.* EARTHLY. — *Ant.* Spiritual, high-minded.

world'y-ness, *n.* — *world'y*, *n.*

world'y-mind'ed (see Pron., § 2), *adj.* Devotedly engrossed in, worldly interests. — *-mind'ed-ly*, *adv.* — *-mind'ed-ness*, *n.*

world'y-wise' (see Pron., § 2), *adj.* Wise as to the ways of this world.

world power. A state or organization powerful to affect world politics by its influence or action.

world, or world's, series. Baseball. A series of ball games played in the fall of each year between the champion teams of the two major leagues to decide the professional championship of the United States.

world soul. A spiritual being having the same relation to the world that the soul has to the individual.

world spirit. The animating spirit of the universe.

World War. The international conflict (1914-18) which ultimately involved the principal nations of the world.

world'-wide' (see Pron., § 2), *adj.* Extended throughout the world.

worm (*würm*), *n.* [AS. *wyrm*, *wurm*, serpentine.]

1. An earthworm or angleworm; also, a larva of a maggot. 2. Any of numerous small, elongate, wormlike, soft-bodied, naked, or limber, wormlike things.

3. A being like a worm by reason of its humility, debasement, etc. 4. A spiral, vermiculated, or concealed as like the thread of a screw. 5. Something that torments or devours in a way suggesting the worm. 6. pl. Any disorder due to the presence of parasitic worms in the body, as in the intestines.

7. The spiral condensing tube of a still. 8. *MIMIFORM PROCESS* a & b. 9. *Mach.* A screw, the threads of which gear with the teeth of a wheel or a rack. 10. *Mech.* An Archimedean screw, or conveyor working on the same principle.

= VER- *LYTNA*. — *Ant.* Azurc.

— *Abbreviations of Abbreviations, etc., precede Vocabulary.*

— *Word.*

Clerk (*reading*): "wedding, n. a marriage; nuptial ceremonies or festivities." But what's "marriage"? (*Looks it up*) "marriage, n. the act of legally uniting a man and woman in wedlock; marriage ceremony." What's "wedlock"? (*throws the dictionary disgustedly, lets his head sink into his hands*)

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, Clerk Number Seventy, please continue stocking. Clerk Number Seventy, please continue stocking merchandise.

(*The young man stands, looks at the box . . . then he goes quietly back to his work.*)

Clerk: Size two, white baby shoes.

(*A man is seen and heard. He is whistling happily. He is about thirty-five, is wearing very thick looking glasses. He carries some books and a huge bouquet of pink roses. He appears slightly idiotic at first. He practically hops down the stairs. The clerk turns and rises. He looks at the man and smiles. Then slowly he begins to stiffen but never gets as stiff as previously.*)

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, please wait on customer.

(*The clerk does not move*)

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, Clerk Number Seventy, please wait on customer.

(*The clerk relaxes, shakes himself as if from a stupor and comes forward.*)

Man with Flowers: Hello there.

Clerk: Hello.

Man with Flowers: I want size ten loafers.

(*He seats himself and his parcels and hums 'Oh what a beautiful day.' Then he stretches his hands over his head. The clerk returns with boxes. They proceed to try on shoes. While the man is running up and down trying the feel of the shoes, the clerk sinks exhausted into the last chair. The flowers catch his attention.*)

Man with Flowers: Ha, interested in botany? I bought these over at Conover's.

Good buy too. But then, it was a good year for the rose family.

Clerk: I've never seen one before. What did you call it?

Man with Flowers: A rose? You've never seen a rose before? (*He comes back, breaks off a rose and hands it to the clerk*)

Here take one. I got two dozen this time. I had a whopper of a fight with my wife last night. It'll do her good to find only twenty-three there. Stirs up the old jealousy.

(*The young man grins wonderingly. The man with flowers looks at him, muttering under his breath, "Never saw a rose?!"*)

Clerk: Thank you!

Man with Flowers: Yes sir, you've got to keep 'em guessing. Are you married?

Clerk: . . . No, I don't think so . . . (*More firmly*) No.

Man with Flowers: 'Shame. Greatest thing in the world. If you know how to handle it that is. I've got it down to a science by now. Yes sir, to get a gem of a wife, you have to give the old oyster a little irritant now and again. I make it a policy to have a fight with my wife once a week. Do you have a ten and a half in this? It feels a little tight.'

Clerk: No, I'm sorry. We should be getting them in by about Wednesday, though.

Man with Flowers: I'll come back then, O.K.? No sense getting them too tight, is there? You ought to go out and get yourself a wife, fellow. Greatest thing in the world. Great time of year for a honeymoon.

Clerk: Honey . . . moon . . . ?

Man with Flowers: Yeah, you know—wedding trip. Niagara Falls should be great this time of year. Well, I've got to be running along. Ethel always fixes something special for lunch after a fight. So long . . .

(As he is ascending the stairs, a boy with a book in his hand starts down.
The two meet about half way up)

Boy with Book: Hi, Mr. Ross.

Man with Flowers: Hello, Tom. Say, how's the paper coming this month?

Boy with Book: Fine, sir. All put to bed. I just left it off at the printers. It should be a fine edition this month. We worked pretty hard on those layouts. Oh by the way, Bill King will be setting up an interview for the Bio Club's next report, so he'll be around to see you.

Man with Flowers: Yes, he's already spoken to me. I'll be looking for this issue. You know, I used to be editor of my high school paper, so if there's anything I can help you with, just let me know. And say, don't forget your dissecting kit Tuesday!

Boy with Book: No, Sir, I won't—not this time. Goodbye, Sir.

(Man exits, boy comes down)

Boy with Book (to clerk): You know there are more former editors in that school than in U.P.! Someday I'm going to check their records and see how many are making it up. What I really came for, was a job. I thought you might be able to use someone before Christmas for after school and on Saturdays. Any chance of it? I know you don't usually hire anyone for the season, but it looks like an extra big Christmas this year. I'm reliable and I can give you good references.

Clerk (confused): Job . . . Christmas? . . . I don't know . . . ? . . .

Boy with Book: Well, is there someone else in charge that I could talk to?

Clerk (quite miserably gestures to P.A. box, lets hand drop) I don't know.

Boy with Book (not unfriendly): You don't know?? What do you mean? Is there someone around here or not? You're not the boss, so who is? If he's not here, I'll come back later. Do you know when he will be here?

Clerk (anguished, realizing): You don't understand . . .

Boy with Book: What don't I understand? Are you the boss or aren't you? Or where is the boss? I can't talk any more clearly than that, can I?

Clerk: I don't know. That's the point. I don't know anything. Don't you see? I don't know who's the boss or who I am or what I'm doing here or what's out there . . . I don't know anything!

Boy with Book: You mean you've never been out of here? I don't get it. Did you spend your life in this shoe store? Didn't you know what you were missing? How do you know now? I just don't understand it. It's the craziest thing I've ever heard.

Clerk: It's that box. I've been listening to that box and it never told me anything about the outside. It cheated me. Just this morning things started happening. Things happened to me—a little boy, a woman, that man that just left. He gave me this flower. I started asking myself questions. But I don't know where the answers are. What shall I do?

Boy with Book: There!

(He points up staircase, then holds out his hand. The clerk tries to move forward, then turns away. The boy shrugs and as he trots up the stairs, calls back:)

No one can help you but yourself.

Clerk: (calling after him): I . . . can't . . .

(Slow movements. He picks up the dictionary and takes the rose quartz from the cash register. He sits in one of the middle chairs.)

Clerk: (*holding them in his hands*): This is a rose quartz. This is a dictionary, (*fingering*) this is a rose. But where do they come from. The Little Boy said he'd find some flaky rock—but where? The man bought those flowers. Is there a store that sells something besides shoes? Everything but shoes comes from the big catalogue, doesn't it? (*flipping pages of dictionary*) Do all these things exist? Niagara Falls, what's that, what's that? (*Looks for it*) It's not here. Why would that man mention it, if it doesn't exist? Honeymoon? (*reads*) "honeymoon, n. the first month after marriage; the holiday spent by a newly wed couple before taking up domestic life." Life?? "Life, n. animate existence; vitality: union of soul and body; period between birth and death."

(*tosses dictionary again*)

It's a vicious circle. What are "soul" and "birth" and "death"? and how is it I never knew about any of this before?

(*Suddenly he sits up straight, turns and looks at the P.A. box which is silent*) Why didn't you ever tell me there was something outside? Why didn't you tell me about flaky rocks and roses and marriage and circuses and honeymoons? Why, why? (*Silence, then pitifully*) It's not fair. I deserve to know, don't I? Tell me about what's out there!

Public Address

Speaker: Clerk Number Seventy, Clerk Number Seventy, please finish stocking merchandise. New shipment arrives tomorrow. Clerk Number Seventy, . . . (*keeps repeating the same message*)

(*The clerk goes to the end of the rack, gets the shoe pole and comes back threateningly*)

Clerk: Tell me! (*starts striking the box*) What's Niagara Falls? Where do roses come from? Where is the circus? Where? What? Why? Tell me!

(*All this time the box has been repeating its message as above—during the outrage, the clerk finally knocks the speaker from the ledge. The voice dies suddenly in mid-sentence.*)

Public Address

Speaker: New shipment will arri . . .

(*Silence, the clerk drops the pole*)

Clerk: Why didn't you ever tell me?

(*He kicks the remnants through the chairs to downstage center. Suddenly hysterical again in the silence, he yells.*) I'm all alone. Tell me what to do. (*jumping on box*) Tell me, Tell me!. (*He sits for a minute, exhausted, on one of the chairs. He stares dejectedly at the mass of wood and wires. Then he turns and eyes the staircase somewhat fearfully. He gets up, walks around the chairs, holding onto the backs of them for support. He wets his lips anxiously and walks towards the stairs. He pauses at the foot and feels the railing. He mounts slowly. He reaches the fifth step but is frightened and runs back. He shudders in fear, then calms down as he feels the familiar chairs and shoe store floor. He remembers the box and gazes at it.*)

Clerk: Tell me what to do! I'm all alone. (*more slowly*) I don't know what to do.

(*During this last sentence his voice fades but is still audible to the audience. He begins to stiffen. The curtain drops: our last view of him, he is ramrod straight—waiting?*)

FESTIVAL DIRGE

The tenement sneers
 in a neon sky
webbed in plaster
woven with the warp and woof
 of socks
frosting the wind
and armless sleeves
exulting . . .
The stale wind sirens round a
corner
buffeting garlic laughter
chile . . . psalms . . . and smoke . . .
over the iron railing
onto the hopscotch tar.
A pinata spatters
 holiday
down
the
wailing night
at cats sifting silent
into shadow,
shrieking to the confetti moon.
Under the wheezing windows
sheets
snap.
Fiesta
 crumbles
 into
 morning.

Suzanne Looney '66

Travelogue of a Southern Coast Town

Irene Shortall, '67

Plattville, Georgia is my home town, but I will understand if you miss it on your way along the coast road from New York to Miami, especially if you are racing to get where you are going or to forget what you have left behind. On your way back, though, you won't be in such a hurry, so you should notice the turn-off and the speed limit signs that say thirty-five m.p.h. If you stop at Plattville, you will feel at once alien and strangely drawn to the hypnotic pace of the town. But you will not feel alien merely because you are a tourist, for the town is used to the tourists' business. And you will not feel drawn merely because you are a responsibility-ridden Northerner bursting into an undemanding, sleepy Southern atmosphere.

If you take the turn-off into Plattville, the first thing you will see is the market. It is the big block of a building beside Sandee's Specialty Shop, ("we carry Lord and Taylor"). And the fishermen's wives and the wives of the inland farmers stop to look in Sandee's window before they go to market for ten-pound bags of rice and grits, seven pounds of salted fat-back, and bushels of okra and collard greens—if they're fresh. They probably won't stop on the way home. Not that they don't have time, but they will have heavy bundles and a long walk ahead. By that time, too, it will be later in the morning, and the town women will be going in. Not all the town women shop there, you understand, just the society women, who speak only to each other; any new-comer to the shop will be ignored until she goes away.

The society women all belong to the Women's Club, and their husbands run Atlas Pulp and Paper Company or Lane Shrimp Plant. The hangers-on belong to the Junior Women's Club, and their husbands work at Atlas or at the Shrimp Plant. But their children go to high school together, where the society children and some few ordinary-but-nice kids join fraternities or sororities, and where everyone can smell the Shrimp Plant if the wind is from the sea, or Atlas if the wind is from the west.

The fraternity boys meet at the Pig n' Whistle on Friday nights and drink beer. The junior high boys drink any time, though, and in the summer you will find them stretched out on the beach, sweating as they throw up in the hot sand. The fraternity boys don't get sick; they just get high and have a good time chasing each other on foot or by car, throwing eggs, ducking eggs, crushing eggs in their fists, and rollicking all over town. In the fall they save all that until after the football games. Everyone in town goes to the football games—even the negroes have their section, down toward the end.

Our schools are integrated now and have been for a year. There was some unpleasantness, and a girl was beaten up, but the police stood by and saw to it that Plattville didn't get a reputation for rioting. The high school is right in the middle of colored town, the oldest section, because it was founded in the eighteen hundreds. Early in the morning or late in afternoon the children passing by in yellow busses can see the colored people sitting on their

unpainted porches, surrounded by a riot of bright geraniums, rocking back and forth in the heat and dust from the road.

Plattville's negroes' came from a great tribe in Africa to work the cotton plantations along the Georgia coast. From their ancestors they retain a huge frame and powerful limbs; from their slavery they retain a cocoon of passivity, of apathy, which is sometimes cracked open by the growth agonies of their hot-blooded young men. But the old talk to them until they either go north, escaping to a more subtle intolerance, or settle down beneath an honest hatred which they can understand. The small black children ride their rusty bicycles in the streets of colored town, darting in front of white men's cars, forcing them to slam on the brakes. Then they pedal off furiously on their tin tanks, relieved and certain that they have struck their blow for the big, black, warm animal circling in the moist southern dark and walking abroad still and wall-eyed in the daylight.

If you do not turn off at Plattville, you can take the causeway over the marshes, stretching flat in a magnificent monotony which is broken in spots by groves of live-oaks. "Ye marshes how candid and simple/And nothing withholding and free . . ." says a big brass sign set up by the Junior Chamber of Commerce. The lines are by a minor American poet, Sidney Lanier, from his poem, "The Marshes of Glynn." You may not have heard of it, but everyone in the county has. The island at the end of the causeway has several small night clubs, a teen-age club, and four package stores. If you like night life, this is the place to go on a Saturday. There is a restaurant too, the Wagon Wheel, where the town's magnates bring their frumpishly seductive secretaries while the society women sit home and watch Huntley-Brinkley on T.V.

On the south shore of the island is Plattville's historical monument, an old English fort dating from early colonial times. The tourist is introduced to the story of Fort Saint George by an artfully rustic building which bristles with bright cloth flags, postcard racks, and bits of broken crockery or weapons dug from the fort grounds. Passing through this "museum," you

step out into the heat, wipe the icy perspiration from your face, and set out to explore the field. The grey ruins are like a sketched street plan done in white ink on green construction paper at a late hour when the artist works under a very, very hot light bulb. The only buildings standing complete are the tombs of the dead, where a carelessly thrown cigarette may startle you with its thin wraith of smoke. But the people of Fort Saint George still live in their high-built graves; for late at night, when the exhibition is closed, some few high school boys brave enough to look have seen pale faces peering at them from the round beams of their flashlights.

Another causeway leads from the fort grounds to a resort island where the rich people come at Christmas to go golfing and in the summer to go to the beach. Sometimes the town women go shopping there to meet one of the rich ladies and tell their friends how she was dressed or what she bought. Now and then the local women get a real laugh because these rich old Yankees do the craziest things with their money. But if you get to know them, you might be invited to their club for bridge some day when laughing children are running up and down the beach and their mothers need a "fourth." Even then, when you ring up your friends to tell them where you went and who you went with, they will not be more than mildly excited.

And this is why you will be an alien, the only breathing creature in a cardboard town. It is not only the heavy humidity from the marshes, although the weighty air has something to do with it. But there is, most of all, a lack of wonder. There is no wonder in the eyes of poor women looking at Lord and Taylor suits; there is no wonder in the eyes of children peering from school buses. The women do not find zest for life in their T.V. sets; the boys do not find joy in their beer cans. But a poet once drew his inspiration from Plattville: and there is an unthinking peace, a rhythmic movement which, although it does not go forward, does not go backward either. There is a secure sameness, a predictability, a relaxed, pleasant stagnation.

SPAYNE STAYS MAINLY IN THE PLAIN

Christine Wroblewski '65

An Editorial Memo from ERR-TV:

Here at ERR, the words "the vast wasteland" are not merely empty words. ERR is known throughout the state for the quality of its programming. And in keeping with ERR's unique programming policy, we take pleasure in presenting *Spayne Stays Mainly in the Plain*.

Cast: Big John Spayne
 Doctor Ben Stacy
 Leader of the robbers
 Second robber
 Horse
Time: 1846
Place: Last Gasp, California

Big John Spayne rides in from the prairie. He is tired and thirsty. His horse, Ferdinand, is splattered with mud.

As Big John dismounts, a horde of villains rounds the corner and stops in front of the bank. Big John watches them closely.

Big John: "Hmmmmmm. I'd be worried about those fellers, 'cept they're a-wearin' grey hats, not black ones."

(John is a thinking man.)

John steps into the saloon. As he enters, silence reigns. Everyone stares at him. He ignores them all and sidles up to the bar.

Barkeeper: "What'll ya have, stranger?"

Big John: (In a lion-like manner) "Milk."

Barkeeper: "Milk?!!"

Big John: (Snarling) "Milk! Everyone needs at least three glasses of milk a day. It provides calcium for bones and teeth. Besides, it's good for upset stomachs; and this plot nauseates me."

As the barkeeper puts the glass of milk on the bar, shots ring out from the bank. Big John carefully swallows his daily vitamin pill and then rushes into the street. The horde of villains rushes from the bank. Immediately Big John fearlessly pounces on the nearest robber.

Big John: "Gotcha!"

BREAK FOR STATION IDENTIFICATION AND SIX COMMERCIALS,
THE HEADLINES, AND THE WEATHER REPORT.

Fade back in to Big John saying:

Big John: "Gotcha!"

Then it happens. Instead of fighting and shooting his way out of the predicament, the robber falls to his knees.

Villain: (*Pleadingly*) "Please, oh, please! authority figure, don't hit me!"

Big John: "What??!"

Villain: "You see, I had no other chance to be anything but a robber. We came from an underprivileged and culturally deprived area. No one sent us CARE packages. What else could I do but become an obsessive repulsive, a product of my environment!"

Big John: (*Soothingly*) "There. There. Why don't you tell me all about it."

Villain: "Well, my ma was so busy dealin' faro and blackjack to my pa that she dint have no time to fetch us up. Please, authority figure, don't punish me; rehabilitate me."

But Big John doesn't have time to promise anything. The leader of the grey-hatted villains, who wear grey because they are not totally to blame for their maladjusted psyches, steps up behind Big John and, in the most non-violent way possible, smashes him over the head with a rock. Big John sinks to the ground and the two robbers escape.

BREAK FOR STATION IDENTIFICATION, RECIPE FOR MARSHMALLOW-SARDINE SANDWICH SPREAD, HUNTLEY AND BRINKLEY.

Fade back in to Big John sprawling on the street and the townspeople gathering around.

Townsman: "Call the doc!"

Townsman 2: "Git the sheriff!"

Townsman 3: "Where's the whiskey?"

Big John: "Yeah, git the whiskey."

Townsman: "Who said that?"

Big John: "I did."

Townsman: "Who are you?"

Big John: "I'm Big John Spayne. Who are you?"

Townsman: "I'm the doc."

Big John: "Whaall, give me some whiskey and let me git after them bank robbers."

Doc Stacy: "Now hold on there. I can't let you jest walk away from the scene of a accident. You got any Blue Cross or Blue Shield coverage?"

Big John: "No, but I got Medicare."

Doc Stacy: "Hmmmmmm."

Big John: "What does 'Hmmmmmm' mean?"

Doc Stacy: "It means you'll have to cum to my office to be operated on. You got a sub-dural hematoma."

Big John: "What's that?"

Doc Stacy: "A trichloroethylene angiogram brought on by innervated bromine disso-propylflourophosphate, complicated by sodium salicylate."

Big John: "What are you—some kind of a nut?!"

Doc Stacy: "Obviously your brain is affected if you don't recognize the great Doctor Ben Stacy."

Big John: "I don't care if your name is Zorro; hurry up and operate. This show is only an hour long and I still have to catch those crooks."

Fade out. Fade in to Big John anesthetized on the table. Cut to Doc Stacy, masked, sweating profusely. A hand dabs the perspiration from his forehead.

The camera cuts to a shot of Big John's agonized expression. He moans, manfully. His eyes roll slowly up to Doc Stacy's face.

Big John: "Ah . . . ah . . . you were . . . the robber, I . . . remember your . . . face."

Doc Stacy: (*Smirking evilly*) "I'm sorry you thought of that, Big John. Now I'll

have to take care of you."

The doc's eyes shrinkle up. A pang of conscience shoots through his face.

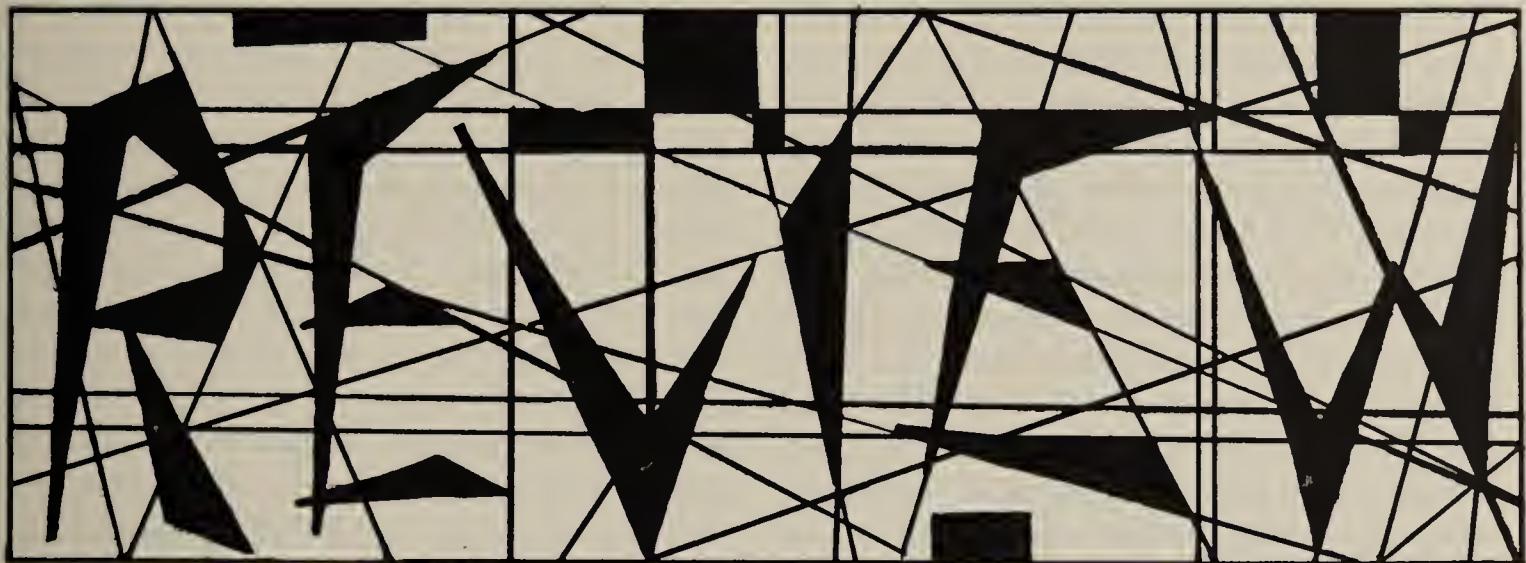
Doc Stacy: "No. I'm a doc. I promised to save lives with my hypercritical oath."

But, as the doc bends over Big John, he notices something is wrong. Big John has passed on. The doc took too much time arguing with himself.

Doc Stacy: "O well," (ripping off his mask), "you win some, you lose some."

THE END





Council Speeches of Vatican II. Edited by Hans Kung, Yves Congar, O.P., Daniel O'Hanlon, S.J. Deus Books, 1964.

In selecting the speeches to include in this book, the editors, three eminent theologians, were guided by their concern to "show some of the diverse variety of peoples and problems which is so characteristic of this Council." Their achievement of this end, while a source of deep joy and enlightenment for the reader, can be a source of frustration for the reviewer. Which of the problems presented in fifty-five short speeches does one highlight in order to convey some of the richness and complexity of this book? Having selected the main issues, does one then treat the book as a theological treatise, as an historical document, or with a little imagination as "The Drama of Vatican II?" Perhaps the most fruitful solution is to view the book on all three levels, theological, historical and dramatic, at the same time stressing the underlying concern with one basic question, "What is the nature of the Church?" In this respect the Council is clearly contemporary, for just as modern man asks himself, "Who am I?" "What does it mean to be a man?" the Church is asking, "What does it mean to be the Church of God, established by Christ?"

The recently published Constitution on the Church proves the Council Fathers' concern for this question. In these earlier speeches we discern at least three changes of attitude as the Fathers work toward a definition. There is a

decided stress on deemphasizing the hierarchical image of the Church and substituting instead its "fraternal reality." Cardinal Suenens, for example, suggests that the Church must not be defined as "an administrative apparatus with no intimate connection with the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit." Instead, she is "a living web of gifts, charisms, and ministries." The decline of a *contemptus mundi* attitude toward the social order in favor of an attitude of "profound understanding and sincere admiration" for the world is clearly discernible. All Christians must "accept the responsibility to renew the temporal order." The third concept, the Church as "the people of God on pilgrimage through time," is deeply relevant, for the pilgrimage implies that the Church is "not without fault, not without sin."

The concept of the Church's guilt because it is "not yet being as catholic as it should be," lends a new dimension to historical occurrences, such as the schisms and the first Reformation. As an historical document, the book reveals the movements of the present moment, such as ecumenism and liturgical renewal, while offering new perspectives on the past. These speeches reflect the bishops' recognition that "unworthy" or "defective" historical accretions may have distorted the true image of the universality of the Church. As the Patriarch of Antioch points out, the "press of those countries which have nothing in common with the civilization of the Mediterranean" should bring a

realization that a "contingent fact of the Christian West should not be made the rule for the universal Church."

In the speeches revealing the encounter of East and West, the drama of the council is most vividly expressed. Perhaps this is because the Fathers from the East, such as D'Souza from Bhopal, India, and Maximos VI from Antioch, offer some of the most fruitful insights into the nature of the Church in the twentieth century. Throughout the speeches and particularly in the controversial or pointed ones, the reader is constantly aware of the drama of the scene, and always senses the speaker-audience relationship. The book, ultimately, is not just a string of speeches, but a living presentation of the intellectual, theological and historical dynamism of Vatican II. In presenting the diversity of the Council, the editors have enabled the reader to "sense the spirit" of the Council. As they themselves suggest, there is no better way to do this than to read these speeches of the Council Fathers in this, the Church's second Reformation.

Alice M. Mack, '65

Bad Characters. Jean Stafford. New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1964.

The title of this short story collection is perhaps misleading. No satanic scoundrels slink through the pages; Miss Stafford's villains are pervasively pernicious, but operate in petty, selfish ways. Qualifying her title in relation to the characters of her stories, she says, "Some of them have wicked hearts, but as many of them are victims." Some are even victimized by benevolence, as is Angela who dedicates herself like a vestal virgin to her beauty, because people recognize only this aspect in her and idealize it. When her hands start showing her age, and she realizes that her beauty, which has become quite literally her person, is doomed, she dies of that anachronistic disease — a broken heart. In another story the same fear of losing all love through losing her office of guardian of the mystery overwhelms the child Hannah. A pawn in her parent's infighting, her father sacrifices her to his jealousy of her mother by cutting off her beautiful hair because it sym-

bolizes her mother's beauty, both to him and to the rival he fears.

The really bad characters, to return to the title, are hiss-provokingly vile. Grandma Placer, the autocrat of the boarding house table, perceives life as a continual insult in which all living beings not resident under her roof collaborate. She manages to corrupt to her suspicious belligerence, the two orphaned sisters whom fate and their father's insurance policy had thrown upon the hardness of her heart. But even worse than she, and surely the most obnoxious character to come down the literary pike in many a day, is Frau Persis Galt, a *faux-devot* convert to Catholicism and an elegant psychological bully who holds onto her disillusioned young lover by threatening to expose him to his Nazi commanders as a Jew.

Miss Stafford has an extraordinarily graphic consciousness of time and place, and in her fiction, environment has the force of another character. This awareness, which has led her to create a town and recurrent characters, and her central concern with change and permanence, remind one of Faulkner and Updike. As with Updike, a basic unity of experience is discernible throughout her work; in her case, childhood in Colorado, schooling in Boston and Heidelberg. She has a women's eye for the characterizing detail and an abundant invention of incident. Her subtlety and psychological penetration save her characters from being types, as they would almost surely have been in the hands of a less skilled writer. Her style is sophisticated (most of the stories appeared first in the *New Yorker*) and witty (which trait the reviewer has not dwelt upon in the recognition that wit is unparaphraseable). The characters themselves, however bad, are never bores. They constantly provoke the reader to laughter, sympathy, or righteous indignation.

Anne Miller, '65

Atheism in Our Time. Ignace Lepp. New York: Macmillan, 1964.

Writing as much about belief as atheism, Father Lepp presents in this book a complex study of unbelievers in modern France. The author's background as a Marxist and his pro-

fession as a psychoanalyst qualify him to offer a distinctive and tolerant analysis of contemporary men who reject God for various reasons and in different ways.

Contending that, "Our aim is not to study atheism, but atheists," Father Lepp emphasizes the individual character of unbelief. He divides the book into chapters on neurotic, Marxist, rationalistic, and existentialist atheism. The basic tenets of each philosophy are presented and then applied to several case studies which emphasize the personal factors in each individual decision. The author describes his own presuppositions as a Marxist and the steps toward his conversion to illustrate the ways in which background, education, and personality can dispose a man either to atheism or to Christianity.

The book is directed at Christians — leveling a frontal assault on familiar platitudes and simplistic thinking. Denying on one extreme the accusation that atheists are morally unable to meet the demands of the Church, Father Lepp points out that there are unbelievers who reject Christianity because it asks too little of its disciples. In response to more sophisticated arguments against atheism, he refutes from experience the statements that all men are naturally Christian, that people are invariably concerned with ultimate questions, and that the existence of God can be rationally proved to anyone in good faith. He argues that many people are naturally atheistic, accepting the non-existence of God as credulously as most believers affirm His reality. In the modern world, it is not necessary that a man be confronted with a direct choice between religion and atheism. Many are atheists because they know nothing else, although some have rejected Christianity for a real or imagined fault. In this respect the author notes that Christianity tends to alienate people through infidelity to the social Gospel rather than through any doctrinal or ethical position.

Marx, Nietzsche, Malraux, Sartre and Camus figure in this study as influential spokesmen, but their significance is strictly qualified. Father Lepp maintains that their writings verbalize and support established feelings and do not instill new attitudes. He finds little evidence that faith is lost through philosophical studies. Apologetical arguments appear equally ineffec-

tive in restoring belief. Atheism, unlike agnosticism, is rarely based on pure rationalism, but emerges from a complex interaction of social and psychological factors.

Father Lepp's study might be more meaningful if he distinguished between atheism and agnosticism with greater clarity. It appears that the latter is treated in the chapter on rationalistic atheism, but the two philosophies are generally grouped under the loose heading of unbelief. In America, where agnostics outnumber atheists, a fuller treatment of their attitudes would be welcome. This book, however, is based exclusively on French beliefs and experiences.

Valuable simply as a discussion of atheism, the book takes on added interest in its implied critique of Christianity. The Church has failed to fulfill the social Gospel and has often emphasized devotions and dogmas which fail to satisfy the needs of modern man. In a chapter on "The Unbelief of Believers," Father Lepp treats as "atheist believers" those people "who seek primarily in religion what is only there secondarily," those who confuse accidents with essences.

By confronting thoughtful Christians with the need to purify the faith from historical accretions and to practice the message of Christ, atheists may have presented a challenge to the Church which will be a stimulus to growth. Father Lepp views their influence not only with tolerance but even with optimism in this clear and comprehensive analysis.

Jane Donahue, '65

For the Union Dead. Robert Lowell. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964.

Perhaps the single most impressive concern in Robert Lowell's latest book of poetry, *For the Union Dead*, is the problem of time. An acute awareness of the here-and-now in relation to a vivid past characterizes nearly all of the poems and a blend of personal and historical experience earmarks the volume as Lowell's.

History and tradition have always been plentiful in his poetry, but in this book the peculiarly personal aspects of these appear. Lowell's aware-

ness of the past as an expression of a multitude of individual lives gives the purely factual background an immediacy and vitality often lacking in historically-based works. In such a brief poem as "Epigram," Lowell gives us not a date, a battle, a victor, but a searing picture of flesh and blood people, about to sacrifice their own existences for a greater good:

*Think of Leonidas perhaps and the hoplites
glittering with liberation,
as they combed one another's golden Bot-
ticellian
hair at Thermopylae—friends and lovers,
the bride and the bridegroom—
and moved into position to die.*

"Those Before Us" illustrates the poet's ability to infuse vitality into those dead and gone for countless generations:

*They are all outline, uniformly gray,
unregenerate arrowheads shouged up by the
path here,
or in the corners of the eye, they play
their thankless, fill-in roles. They never were.*

*Vacations, stagnant growth. But in the silence,
some one lets out his belt to breathe, some one
roams in negligee. Bless the confidence of their
sitting unguarded there in stocking feet.*

These qualities, though forming a predominant and continuing thread throughout the volume, do not exhaust Mr. Lowell's resources and accomplishments. His language borders on the violent in its force, with a sensuousness of detail and a discipline of form. Concomitant with this concentration of expression we find a certain colloquial tone, a relaxed, informal intimacy between the poet and his subjects, whether that subject is his own myopia or the Union dead. Lowell's ability to correlate the microscopically personal with the magnificently disconcerted world at large, accounts in large part for much of the painfulness and irony of his poetry. In "The Drinker" many of these qualities are evidenced, not only as they appear in the bulk of Lowell's poetry, but as an example of the strength and intensity to which he has matured:

The man is killing time—there's nothing else.

*No help now from the fifth of Bourbon
chucked helter-skelter into the river,
even its cork sucked under.*

...
*Stubbed before-breakfast cigarettes
burn bull's-eyes on the bedside table;
a plastic tumbler of alka-seltzer
champagnes in the bathroom.*

...
*Is he killing time? Out on the street
two cops on horseback clop through the
April rain
to check the parking meter violations—
their oilskins yellow as forsythia.*

In this collection of Lowell's poems we can see the same intensity of experience and vitality of language which characterize even his earliest works. Yet, *For the Union Dead* reveals more than a continued excellence on Lowell's part, it illustrates the gradual development of the poet to a perfect mastery of his form. In addition to this, the volume reveals a personal growth concomitant with that of Lowell's art.

Linda McCarriston, '65

Shadow and Act. Ralph Ellison. New York:
Random House, 1964.

This series of essays by the much-praised author of *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison, deals with three thematic concerns of any serious consideration of American culture: literary criticism, Negro music, especially jazz and the blues, and the function of the Negro-American sub-culture in its relation to the total society.

Ellison's literary theory consists of convictions which, although not fully explicated in the text, do converge into a theoretical frame. An artist is the product of his experience, and "the act of writing requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past." Shadow and act mutually inform one another in the creative process.

Ellison sees literature as a means of relating oneself to one's culture. It is at this point that the author's somewhat romantic and painful self-awareness of his role as a "spokesman for the Negro race" intrudes upon the reader's sensibilities. Ellison evaluates American literature in terms of social justice and the "social effect" of each individual writer. Hemingway is chastized for excluding the Negro from his

stories. Faulkner is equally reprehensible for refusing to deal with "Negro humanity" (a concept Ellison continually repeats, but never precisely defines). Faulkner is referred to as a "sensitive Southerner" with a "mixed" attitude. He is accused of reverting to "malignant stereotypes (the bad nigger) . . . and benign stereotypes (the good nigger)." While Ellison's concern with these offences is understandable in the light of his own unique involvement in his society, nevertheless his postulates cannot be seriously accepted as the *sine qua non* of all American fiction.

This subjective factor in Ellison's responses and judgments causes one to doubt their full validity and applicability. As a critic, Ellison has a bias for a socially-conscious art. He makes several references to his former involvement with Marxist theories. Although he repudiates "proletarian fiction," one suspects that Marxian beliefs about the relationship between "humanism" and literature's dramatization of the human situation influence his critical formulae.

The section of the book which claims to deal directly with the Negro sub-culture in America is also marred by Ellison's attempts to realize his self-defined position as both "Renaissance man" and representative of Negro scholars. He insists that the non-directive nature of American social sciences has contributed, albeit indirectly, to the "dehumanization" of the Negro in our society which has been allowed throughout American history. Again the author's Marxian bias informs his thinking more than he himself realizes. American movies and musical forms are also objects of Ellison's critical dissatisfaction because of their distortion of American Negro life.

In that section of the book in which Ellison describes his involvement in and perceptions about American mainstream jazz, he is least defensive, least pretentious, perhaps most successful. The sketches of Charlie Parker and the cult that surrounded him and other Negro jazz performers are delightful. They spontaneously communicate the deep meaning jazz has for Negro Americans.

Because of America's current interest and involvement in civil rights, *Shadow and Act* is assured of a large reading public. One can only hope that the reader approaches Ellison critically, fully conscious of his subjective biases. Despite

his implications to the contrary, Ellison is not presenting the definitive stance of Negro leadership or of the Negro population. The book has value as a subjective documentary of opinion at a historical moment.

Marsha Madsen, '65

The Far Field. Theodore Roethke. Garden City, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964.

In this slim volume of poetry which marks the last published work of one of the finest contemporary American poets, Theodore Roethke uses the subhuman universe as the main analogue for his thematic pursuit of being. Mr. Roethke continually affirms in his lyrics of the self that the creative process of becoming is the sole source of meaning in a world stymied by nihilism. The quartet, "Meditation at Oyster Bay," is a dramatic monologue — typical of the longer narratives — in which the poet finds solace and revitalization by witnessing the twilight activity of seashore specimens:

*Now in the waning of light,
I rock with the motion of morning
In the cradle of all that is,
I'm lulled into half-sleep
By the lapping of water,
Cries of the sandpiper.
Water's my will and my way,
And the spirit runs, intermittently,
In and out of the small waves,
Runs with the intrepid shorebirds —
How graceful the small before danger!*

Here exploration of the natural world provides a correlate for personal renewal.

In the title poem, "The Far Field," the prose-like statements of self-sensibility are fused in the final image of rippling water:

*The pure serene of memory in one man, —
A ripple widening from a single stone
Winding around the waters of the world.*

Similarly in poems like "The Rose" and "The Meadow Mouse," the poet metaphorically identifies his struggle for psychic equilibrium with the instinctual growth of the physical world.

The polished precision which typifies Mr. Roethke's style is most obvious in the group of poems termed "sometimes metaphysical." Moods range from the frightening playfulness of "The Restored" ("In a hand like a bowl/ Danced my own soul") to the mystic despondence of "The Marrow" ("I bleed my bones, their marrow to bestow/Upon that God who knows what I would know"). The most representative of the light, graceful Roethkean lyric is "The Right Thing" in which the poet asserts his personal integrity despite the incomprehensibility of existence:

*Child of the dark, he can outleap the sun,
His being single, and that being all:
The right thing happens to the happy man.*

The shorter, less serious section of love poems displays the poet's penchant for whimsical quips, word play, and short compact lines. "Wish for a Young Wife" with its almost nursery rhyme cadence exhibits his appealing technical skill:

*My lizard, my lively writher,
May your limbs never wither,*

*May the eyes in your face
Survive the green ice
Of envy's mean gaze;
May you live out your life
Without hate, without grief,
And your hair ever blaze,
In the sun, in the sun,
When I am undone,
When I am no one.*

Other poems — "The Shy Man," "Light Listened," "The Happy Three" — reveal a candid and genial personality finding complete satisfaction in human relationships.

Mr. Roethke's major achievement in this posthumous book of verse is his supreme lyrical control which allows him to overcome his earlier restless compulsion for self-expression at the expense of artistry. The wholesome simplicity and directness of his vision, and the casual, unassuming elegance of his lyrics afford a unique and refreshing poetic experience. *The Far Field* is the final memorial of a sensitive, vulnerable poet who was always engaged in the process of becoming — always becoming the wiser man.

Carol Shea, '65

